

THE WORLD CLIMATE CONFERENCE: A CONFERENCE OF EXPERTS ON CLIMATE AND MANKIND, HELD IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, DURING 12–23 FEBRUARY 1979

The World Climate Conference, organized mainly by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and held near their headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, was the first international conference of its kind, with the topics discussed ranging over the entire spectrum of knowledge and issues related to climate. Indeed, there was considerable emphasis placed on the many complex and vital questions having to do with the impact of climatic variability (from year to year) and climatic change (from decade to decade or century to century) on human affairs.

The first week of the Conference, following the welcoming remarks from the several international organizations that had cooperated with WMO in organizing it, was devoted to the presentation of some 25 overview papers. This part of the Conference was open to invited participants, and nearly 400 people from many parts of the world participated. The President was Dr Robert M. White, of Washington, D.C.

The topics covered by the overview papers were grouped under several main headings that demonstrate the broad sweep of the subject: The global system that determines climate, influences of mankind on the climatic system, and impacts of climate on mankind. Under the last were grouped those activities that are clearly sensitive to the vagaries of weather and climate, including water resources, human health, agriculture, forestry, land-use, fisheries and offshore development, and the economies of nations and of the world.

The second week of the Conference was attended by a smaller group of about 120 invited experts, including the speakers and sessional chairmen of the previous week, and four working groups were organized to deal with the five topics considered to be central to the issue of climatic change. These are: the provision of better climatic data of all kinds, the application of the knowledge of climate to human affairs, the study of the impacts of climatic change on society, research on climatic change and variability, and (a theme that threads through all the others) the influence of society on climatic change and variability. As was made clear in the Declaration of the Conference (appearing elsewhere in this issue*), the realization that humanity can in fact influence the climate of the Earth in a very significant way, is one of the reasons for the growing importance of considerations of climate—and a reason for the establishment by WMO of the World Climate Programme (see *Environmental Conservation*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 293–4, Winter 1978).

Summaries of the overview papers were available to the participants, and the Conference Proceedings (containing the full texts of the papers and the reports of the working groups) will be published by the WMO in the Summer of 1979. It is certain that this rather substantial volume will be a major source of authoritative information on the wide range of problems relating to climate and its impacts on society. Furthermore, the working group reports will serve as the basis for implementing the new World Climate Programme, and they

can also provide guidance for the national climate programmes that are being fostered in many countries.

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CONFERENCE OF PARTIES TO THE 'WASHINGTON' CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES, HELD IN SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA, 19–30 MARCH 1979

On this occasion of the second conference on the 'Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora' (CITES), which had been signed in Washington in 1973, some 260 delegates from 50 countries reached agreement on new international measures to protect the world's vanishing wildlife resources. Sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme, the two-weeks' meeting was inaugurated by Costa Rica's head of state, President Rodrigo Carazo.

The purpose of the Convention is to curb and control the world-wide traffic in rare animals and plants, and the equally booming trade in wildlife products such as ivory, leopard skins, turtle meat, and reptiles' hides—all of which are currently manufactured into luxury items. Membership of the Convention now includes many of the principal 'wildlife-importing' states (including USA, USSR, Canada, Australia, and most of Western Europe), and Third-World countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which are 'producers' and exporters of wildlife and wildlife products. Several states which are not yet members attended the San José meeting as observers and announced their intention of ratifying the treaty soon (among them were Israel, Japan, Mexico, and the Netherlands). China sent a five-men delegation from Peking, and distributed a report on its nature conservation programmes.

More than 50 non-governmental organizations, mostly from the USA, also participated as observers. These included a 'coalition' of 32 environmental conservation groups ranging from the World Wildlife Fund and the US Environmental Defense Fund, to the British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Wild Birds Society of Japan. The coalition alone effectively outbalanced the lobby of observers from the pet-trade and the fur-trade industries.

The San José Conference agreed on a series of new measures to improve governmental controls over imports and exports of all wildlife threatened with extinction, to assist national customs agents in identifying endangered plant and animal species, and to collaborate with Interpol in the fight against illegal wildlife traffic. The Convention's lists of protected species were enlarged to include all whales and smaller cetaceans (such as dolphins and porpoises), all birds-of-prey (including owls), and a number of other species of animals and plants whose survival is considered to be in jeopardy.

The Conference heard alarming statements from Kenya and Tanzania on the decline of the Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*), which is now on the brink of extinction owing to poaching and illegal trade. On the

*See pp. 137–8.—Ed.

other hand, well-protected species such as the American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) were shown to have recovered, and so controlled commercial exploitation was now being authorized. A similar proposal to permit trade in the South American Vicuña (*Vicugna vicugna*) was defeated after heavy lobbying by conservationists and in opposition to favourable reports from Peru and Chile.

The Conference highlighted the need for improved surveillance and, above all, reliable trade statistics from all member states. Delegates agreed to finance these and other administrative tasks jointly by direct government contributions towards a \$1,000,000 fund under United Nations auspices over the next two years, following a treaty amendment for this purpose. The next regular conference on the CITES Convention is scheduled to be held in India in February 1981. Further information may be obtained from the undersigned.

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THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE, HELD IN THE PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, 27 MARCH–6 APRIL AND 23–28 APRIL 1979

Environmental matters were a principal item on the Commission's agenda this year, as they have been during the three preceding sessions in 1976, 1977, and 1978. They were the main reason why the Commission, for the first time since it was created in 1947, was unable to complete its business in the time allotted and had to reconvene a few weeks later. Several difficulties were eventually resolved and, among its other decisions, the Commission agreed to convene a 'high-level meeting on the protection of the environment from 13–16 November 1979'.

The high-level meeting, the first of its kind to be convened at ministerial level among the thirty-four ECE members from North America and western and eastern Europe (including the USSR), stems from both political and environmental initiatives during the 1970s. One 'parent' is of course the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment which was held in Stockholm in 1972 and, within ECE, the Prague Symposium on Problems Relating to Environment which had been held in 1971. Although ECE had been active in water problems before this time, the Prague symposium marked the beginning of a broader environmental concern, accompanied by the creation, also in 1971, of the body of Senior Advisors to ECE Governments on Environmental Problems as the principal continuing subsidiary body of ECE dealing with matters of environmental concern.

The other main 'parent' of the high-level meeting was the 'Helsinki Final Act' of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. This foresaw the desirability of closer cooperation on environmental matters within the framework of ECE and the United Nations Environment Programme. At the 1976 session of the Commission, the Soviet Union proposed that 'all-European congresses or inter-state conferences on cooperation in

the field of protection of the environment, development of transport, and energy', should be convened to implement the relevant provisions of the Final Act. For the last two years and more the Senior Advisors, at the request of the Commission, have undertaken the detailed preparatory work for such a meeting on the environment.

This preparatory work had to meet a number of criteria which had been set by the Commission—namely that a meeting of this kind 'would require a precise and carefully-prepared [set of] agenda; that the subject-matter should require a high level of representation; that such a meeting should hold promise of important decisions; that the topics for consideration should be of concern to the region as a whole, and not lead to unnecessary duplication of the work of other international organizations'. In deciding to convene the November meeting, the Commission recognized that these criteria had been satisfied.

The agenda of the high-level meeting will include a general debate on the environmental situation in the ECE region—including such topics as long-range transboundary air pollution, low- and non-waste technology, and water pollution including transboundary water pollution. The meeting will also be asked to adopt a Convention and Resolution on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution, and a Declaration of Intent and Recommendations for National Action and International Cooperation including Follow-up Activities within the Framework of the ECE in the field of low- and non-waste technology and reutilization and recycling of wastes.

Negotiation of the draft Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution was a major element in the preparatory work undertaken by the Senior Advisers; the topic was one of the specific fields for environmental cooperation mentioned in the Helsinki Final Act. The Convention will be open for signature by all ECE members, by countries such as Liechtenstein that participate in ECE work on a consultative basis, and by 'regional economic integration organizations, constituted by sovereign States members of the ECE, which have competence in respect of the negotiation, conclusion, and application, of international agreements in matters covered by the ... Convention.' (At the present time, this provision enables the European Economic Community to become a signatory).

Among other clauses, the draft Convention provides that 'Taking due account of the facts and problems involved, the Parties are determined to protect Man and his environment against air pollution and will endeavour to limit and, as far as possible, gradually reduce and prevent air pollution, including long-range transboundary air pollution'. Although the Convention will enter into force only when it has been ratified by twenty-four countries, the accompanying Resolution to be submitted at the high-level meeting contains an affirmation that signatories to the Convention will immediately cooperate on the problems and begin to implement the Convention on a provisional basis.

The high-level meeting will therefore represent the culmination of several years of detailed preparations, but the decisions that it will be asked to take on long-range transboundary air pollution, and on low- and non-waste technology and reutilization and recycling of wastes, will initiate a period of closer international cooperation on these and perhaps other environmental problems.